

it's seen as a fulfilment of the promise made earlier in Numbers 27, where God said that Moses would not reach the promised land himself, because of his rebellion in the wilderness.

Moses has, however, identified Joshua as his successor, who will lead the people into the promised land. He's recognised that the task of leadership is something bigger than he can accomplish in his own life. How often do we manage to do the same? Do we encourage other people to grow as leaders and take more responsibility, or do we feel we can't trust anyone else to do something properly? People who care for vulnerable relatives are often very careful to make sure there are proper arrangements for looking after their spouse or child after they die - but others of us can sometimes seem to behave as if we are immortal and irreplaceable, which doesn't do us, others, or the causes we care for any good.

In churches we are often very aware of the saints who have gone before us - even commemorating them in the names of our buildings, for example. But we should also think of those who will remain after we have gone, and make sure that we are encouraging their gifts of prophecy and leadership, just as Moses encouraged Joshua.

#### Prayer

Lord, you call each of us to our own form of service.

May we help each other discern our callings, and encourage each other in our journeys of faith.

We pray for those called to be leaders, that they may serve with honour, and know that leadership is a team game, rather than a virtuoso performance. And may we know how to be followers, as we seek to follow your way. Amen.

## Daily Devotions *from the United Reformed Church*

### Stories from Exodus

#### part 4



Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> September to Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> September 2020

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### Sunday 6th September Psalm 13

The Rev'd Dr David Pickering, Moderator, National Synod of Scotland,  
Rutherglen URC

How long will you forget me, Lord, and hide your face away? How long shall evils tear my heart and troubles fill my day?	3 Look on their threats & hear my cry, and answer when I call: or they will claim the victory who long to see me fall.
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2 Look on my need, O Lord my God who grants my every breath; give light that I may see your light, not sleep the sleep of death.	4 Lord, in your mercy is my trust; I shall be glad and free; Then shall I sing with all my heart how you have dealt with me.
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Christopher Idle from Psalm 13 © Christopher Idle/Jubilate Hymns Ltd  
you can hear verse 1 sung here  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubu15UGvQl8>

### Reflection

“How long?” cries the Psalmist,  
facing seeming abandonment in the face of affliction.  
“How long?” cries the Psalmist,

Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho, and the Lord showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the Negeb, and the Plain—that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees—as far as Zoar. The Lord said to him, ‘This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, “I will give it to your descendants”; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.’ Then Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord’s command. He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day. Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigour had not abated. The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab for thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended.

Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him; and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

### Reflection

So, after 40 years wandering in the desert Moses gets to see the promised land, but dies before he can reach it. Amazingly, at the age of 120 he has impaired sight and unabated vigour - I imagine plenty of us wish we had those at 30/50/70 let alone 120! Despite this, you might think he has failed in his life’s work - he hasn’t managed to lead the Israelites into Canaan - but there’s no sense of that in the text. Rather,

This reading caught my eye as I was looking through the choices as I'm a great fan of Joshua and his story. It then struck me that today (11th September) is our 27th wedding anniversary so I was reminded once more how God does indeed move in mysterious ways. And the passage today is certainly mysterious. First of all, Moses doesn't get the 'happy ending' he must have hoped for to his long and exhausting journey – he will never get to enter the Promised Land he has spent so long leading the Israelites towards. Instead, Moses must hand over that responsibility to his younger colleague Joshua.

It's challenging enough not to be able to fulfil our dreams, no matter how God-given they might appear to be, and surely it's even worse to commission someone else to fulfil that dream instead. I think if I'd been Moses all those years ago, I certainly wouldn't have been so gracious or so compassionate in word or action. But Moses understands that God is always generous in love and deed, and he commissions Joshua in the same way that God originally commissioned him – that is, with love and confidence and the knowledge that God will always be with him. Because it is God Himself who chooses and directs our path and works out what is best for us and not we ourselves. In this way, the imposing of limitation is as much a blessing as liberation. Both can be gifts.

#### Prayer

Dear God, help us to trust in You and Your plans for us. Help us to understand and accept Your divine will, no matter where it leads us or where it does not. Amen.

[Saturday 12th September Moses' Death](#)

Gordon Woods, Elder, St. Columba's URC, Oxford

Deuteronomy 34: 1 - 12

expressing sorrow as enemies assail.

3000 years on we too may cry,

“How long, will the shadow of illness surround me, or a loved one?”

“How long, shall lockdown separate me from my loved ones?”

Today, Climate Sunday, we may hear other cries:

“How long”, cries Greta, on behalf of the world's youth,

“will we ignore the house on fire?”

“How long?” speaks Sir David on behalf of the scientific community,

“will policy fall short of evidence?”

“How long”, Extinction Rebellion prophetically protest,

“must we wait for a zero-carbon, just and green new normal?”

By articulating their concern,

the Psalmist starts the transforming journey from their hurting, hungry heart.

Their next cry “give light that I may see your light”

opens a way to renewed faith and trust in God.

The Psalmist's journey from problem stated, to solution identified to action taken, is one of engagement and hope.

It is so in our lives; for the way of healing,

is lined with care of body, mind and soul,

and the loneliness of lockdown

may be overcome with phone call, post and social media messaging.

Likewise, the Greta, Sir David and rebellious prophet within us all, being concerned for the wellbeing of life on earth, know:

- of the imperative that policy follows science,
- that personal rights shouldn't trump community well-being
- today's choices should be mindful of tomorrow's generations.

We stand as Moses once did, overlooking the river

to the Promised Land beyond.  
In a post-lockdown world,  
do we just gaze over a fictitious land of hope and dreams?  
or do we 'choose life',  
intentionally setting off to a just and green new normal,  
to which we're called, and ultimately were born to run?

Prayer

As heart cries, "how long"?  
may eye's light see through darkness,  
and hope lead the way.

[Monday 7th September - New Tablets](#)

Walt Johnson, Ordinand at Northern College and Member at Wilbraham  
St Ninian's URC in Chorlton, Manchester

Exodus 34: 1-9

The Lord said to Moses, 'Cut two tablets of stone like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets, which you broke. Be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai and present yourself there to me, on the top of the mountain. No one shall come up with you, and do not let anyone be seen throughout all the mountain; and do not let flocks or herds graze in front of that mountain.' So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the former ones; and he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tablets of stone. The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, 'The Lord.' The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed,

'The Lord, the Lord,  
a God merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger,

God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself" Luke 10.27.

Prayer

Gracious God, give us the insight to know what choices we should make and give us the strength we need to make those choices, Walking the Way of Jesus, in whose power we pray: Amen

[Friday 11th September Joshua Commissioned](#)

Anne Brooke attends Elstead URC in Surrey.

Deuteronomy 31: 1 - 8

When Moses had finished speaking all[a] these words to all Israel, he said to them: 'I am now a hundred and twenty years old. I am no longer able to get about, and the Lord has told me, "You shall not cross over this Jordan." The Lord your God himself will cross over before you. He will destroy these nations before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua also will cross over before you, as the Lord promised. The Lord will do to them as he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when he destroyed them. The Lord will give them over to you and you shall deal with them in full accord with the command that I have given to you. Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.'

Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel: 'Be strong and bold, for you are the one who will go with this people into the land that the Lord has sworn to their ancestors to give them; and you will put them in possession of it. It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.'

Reflection

land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

## Reflection

Choices – every day we make choices: some of us are blessed with so many options that we get confused: what to wear, what to do, what to eat and drink; others long for such an opportunity of choice and feel their lives confined by unavoidable restrictions – but his experiences in Nazi concentration camps led Victor Frankl to write, “Everything can be taken from a person but one thing, the last of human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way!” *Man’s Search for Meaning*.

Our writer today presents the most vital of choices with characteristically Semitic starkness; the issues are clear and the consequences of choice are made clear. Later understanding of God’s ways moved on from presenting those consequences in materialistic terms, though it is easy to be tempted to want virtue to be rewarded in material ways. Choose life and live on God’s terms, or reject God and go your own way; there are no intermediaries, each person needs to choose. God does not punish the wrong-doer but such people bring the consequences on themselves. Although this passage in Deuteronomy is set within the context of God’s covenant with the people we should recognise, as Frankl wrote, that each individual has to make her or his own choice. The consequences of that choice will affect others, perhaps the whole community, but each person has an individual responsibility to live, “loving the Lord your God, obeying him and holding fast to him” so finding fullness of life which is developed when Jesus said, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” John, 10.10. Jesus also said, “You shall love the Lord your

and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.’

And Moses quickly bowed his head towards the earth, and worshipped. He said, ‘If now I have found favour in your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.’

## Reflection

Today’s reading starts part-way through a conversation between God and Moses. On one level, it is about how God will renew the covenant made at Mount Sinai (10 Commandments) with Israel following the Golden Calf incident.

In living memory, the people had witnessed God’s visible acts of power in the Exodus, at the Red Sea and being fed in the desert, yet their impatience at Sinai waiting for Moses turned to idolatry.

This is another example of how important patience is, and God is not to be hurried by our timetable. Throughout the Bible, we see God always giving humankind another opportunity to be reconciled.

Our reading ends (vv.8-9) with Moses interceding on Israel’s behalf and not for the last time. Ultimately, we know that God completed this work Himself on Good Friday through Jesus’ death on the Cross.

Verses 1-3 complete God’s practical instructions; verse 4 returns to the narrative, but what is going on in verse 5? To answer this, look to Exodus

33:18, where Moses asks to see God's "glory".

God answers that He will show Himself, and Moses will see His back (a unique experience in Scripture); but, more importantly, Moses will witness God's goodness, grace and compassion (Exodus 33:19).

The Golden Calf was a hollow idol with no substance; however, God shows Moses and the people what really matters, and it is not appearance. The Golden Calf may have looked pretty, but it could not offer mercy, grace, love and faithfulness.

Hebrew scholars are not sure of the origin of the name of the Lord, often written as "LORD", but most agree it has to do with the verb "to be".

God's very being offers us these noblest qualities, and it is these qualities which God would have us take in and become part of ourselves, that we might show mercy, grace, love and faithfulness in our lives.

Prayer

Merciful God, forgive us: guide us to show mercy to others.

Gracious God, we thank you for all that we have:  
guide our generosity to others.

Loving God, You love us with a power stronger than death:  
guide us to love those we find difficult to love.

Faithful God, You promise to be with us always:  
guide us to remain faithful to the Gospel. Amen.

[Tuesday 8th September Covenant Renewed](#)

The Rev'd Ian Gow Minister, Eltham URC

Exodus 34: 10 - 28

He said: I hereby make a covenant. Before all your people I will perform marvels, such as have not been performed in all the earth or in any nation; and all the people among whom you live shall see the work of the

or Christian Aid are examples. Kind words to strangers and simply telling friends how our personal faith helps us every day can show God's glory shining from us. There is much being said about a "new normal" will we as Christians all make sure that our new normal includes God in every part of it?

Prayer

Loving God,  
shine through me,  
make me a beacon for you  
where there is darkness let me bring light  
where there are feelings of hopelessness or despair, let me bring joy  
in Jesus name, Amen

[Thursday 10th September Choose Life](#)

The Rev'd Julian Macro, retired minister, member of Verwood URC

Deuteronomy 30: 11 - 20

Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?' No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe. See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the

with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. Afterwards all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

### Reflection

Moses had been on the mountain and having a conversation with God. This changed his physical appearance so much that his face shone. This might remind us of the time when Jesus met Moses and Elijah. Matthew 17:2 tells us that Jesus's face shone like the sun. Moses was unaware of this change to his appearance, but the people were afraid of him. He had to summon them to approach him and Moses told them what God had said to him on Mount Sinai.

Do we all reflect the glory of God in our day to day lives or do we leave it for Sundays? Perhaps more importantly does our relationship with God change every part of our lives? Moses's face shone to show that he had been in God's presence and he wore a veil to hide it from other people but removed the veil when with God.

Do we do something similar; do we hide our faith when with non-churchgoers? We should let others see that we have this. We live in times when many people are unsure about the existence of God, a time when they doubt many things. We need to let the love of God shine through us into the dark places that many people inhabit. We can do it in so many ways, supporting organisations such as Commitment for Life

Lord; for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you.

Observe what I command you today. See, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Take care not to make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you are going, or it will become a snare among you. You shall tear down their altars, break their pillars, and cut down their sacred poles (for you shall worship no other god, because the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God). You shall not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to their gods, someone among them will invite you, and you will eat of the sacrifice. And you will take wives from among their daughters for your sons, and their daughters who prostitute themselves to their gods will make your sons also prostitute themselves to their gods.

You shall not make cast idols.

You shall keep the festival of unleavened bread. For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib; for in the month of Abib you came out from Egypt.

All that first opens the womb is mine, all your male livestock, the firstborn of cow and sheep. The firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem.

No one shall appear before me empty-handed.

For six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even in ploughing time and in harvest time you shall rest. You shall observe the festival of weeks, the first fruits of wheat harvest, and the festival of ingathering at the turn of the year. Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel. For I will cast out nations before you, and enlarge your borders; no one shall covet your

land when you go up to appear before the Lord your God three times in the year.

You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leaven, and the sacrifice of the festival of the passover shall not be left until the morning.

The best of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the Lord your God.

You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.

The Lord said to Moses: Write these words; in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel. He was there with the Lord for forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.

## Reflection

The God who had made Himself known to Abraham delivered His people from bondage in Egypt, sustained them through the wilderness years and guided them to the land He had promised their forebears. The covenant theme binds together promises made and the fulfilment of those promises in the life and death of Jesus Christ. In so doing Exodus becomes the catalyst upon which Biblical history is assured and fundamental truth is based. At the heart of the Exodus narrative is the focus on the divine name, the nature of His presence and the significance of the sacrificial Passover lamb.

September, of course, for the Methodist Church marks the beginning of a new year; a time when new ministers and church treasurers take up their appointments and when the regular cycle of committee meetings at church, circuit and district level begins again, the occasion very often being celebrated on the first Sunday with the annual Covenant Service, in memory of the first covenant with God.

September, for us too, heralds a new beginning in our thoughts and plans for the future. One of the most important things for any believer is to be able to discern where God is leading and, having discerned, to respond and follow.

When someone asked the British photographer and pioneering director William Friese-Green, what was the most creative aspect of making films, he answered, "The frame". Not the fabulous locations, the scripts or working with great actors - but the frame. When we are surrounded by so many opportunities and able to see so much potential for what lies ahead, it is vital that we discern where our own path lies. Discerning, and accepting, what we believe we are called to do gives us clarity and freedom and allows us to focus our energies. We all need to listen for that "still, small voice." That goes for us all, you and me.

## Prayer

Do not give up...When you first begin, you find only darkness and as if it were a cloud of unknowing. You don't know what this means except that in your will you feel a simple, steadfast intention reaching out towards God...reconcile yourself to wait in this darkness as long as necessary, but still go on longing after him who you love. (The Cloud of Unknowing - 14th. Century)

[Wednesday 9th September Shine Moses Shine](#)

John Collings, Lay Preacher, Rutherglen URC

Exodus 34: 29 - 35

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking